

We want access to televised information and entertainment, just like everyone else. Closed captions make television programs accessible to us and our family and friends who are deaf or hard of hearing. Closed captioning is an essential part of any television program.

The law requiring closed captioning was passed in 1996. The FCC established closed captioning rules in 1998. The rules required closed captioning to be increased gradually over 8 years. Since January 2006, 100% of all new television programs must be captioned, with some exceptions. Program provided by a Catholic Diocese should not be an exception. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing community is starved for spirituality. Only four percent of this population attends any Church because of lack of access and sensitivity. At our recent International Catholic Deaf Association-United States (ICDA-US), Chapter 29 meeting, here in the Archdiocese of Washington, DC, I shared the information about waiver requests by Catholic Dioceses. All members unanimously agreed everything needs to be captioned.

Faith-based and religious television programs offer and reach out to people who seek spiritual guidance. The main Catholic program that is regularly on television is the weekly Mass. Our Catholic Mass on television is intended to enable people to observe and participate in it, especially if they are ill or elderly. Closed captions provide people who are deaf or hard of hearing with the same opportunities. Deaf and hard of hearing people want access to the Catholic Mass and other programs from their Diocese, just like everyone else.

Today, closed captions are not too difficult or too expensive. No program should be on television without closed captions! We cannot watch television programs without closed captions. With closed captions, we get the program information and the message that the program producer cares about us. To keep costs down, the script can be provided to the captioning companies. Most of the Masses are taped weeks in advance allowing them to be sent to a captioning company and getting them back in time. Also, a large part of the Mass is repeated each time. Other parts are already printed and can easily be prepared for captioning. Many priests prepare a typed copy of their homily or a volunteer can readily prepare a typed copy.

Additionally, the Catholic Bishops issued a document on Church access for disabled people back in 1978. This document has been reaffirmed each ten years since 1978. The FCC must support deaf and hard of hearing consumers and must enforce the closed captioning rules!

I oppose this request because the Petitioner failed to demonstrate that providing closed captioning would impose an undue burden. I urge the FCC to deny this request and require the Petitioner to comply with the closed captioning rules within 90 days.

Sincerely,
Arvilla Rank, Secretary
International Catholic Deaf Association-United States
Chapter 29
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